

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-31 ICA-11 PC-01 PA-01 SS-15
SP-02 EB-08 L-03 ABF-01 TRSE-00 OES-07 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 /102 W
-----108529 080521Z /23

R 080318Z JUN 78

FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8436

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PASS AID, ICA, AND PEACE CORPS; AID FOR NE

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAID, AF

SUBJECT: U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN: MEETING WITH MINISTER
OF HIGHER EDUCATION MAHMUD SUMA

1. SUMMARY. I MADE MY INITIAL CALL ON THE MINISTER OF
HIGHER EDUCATION ON JUNE 4. WE DISCUSSED HIS PLANS FOR
HIGHER EDUCATION, AND OUR AID, PEACE CORPS, AND EDUCATIONAL
EXCHANGE ACTIVITIES. THE MINISTER APPEARED KNOWLEDGEABLE,
WELL-BRIEFED, AND FAVORABLY DISPOSED TOWARDS CONTINUATION
OF U.S. PROGRAMS. END SUMMARY

2. ON JUNE 4, ACCOMPANIED BY THE AID AND PEACE CORPS
DIRECTORS AND THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER, I MADE MY
INITIAL CALL ON THE NEW MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION,
MAHMUD SUMA. WITH THE MINISTER WERE THE NEW DEPUTY
MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, PIR ZERAI (FORMER PRESIDENT
OF CULTURAL AND FOREIGN RELATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY UNDER
DAOUD -- AND BROTHER OF THE PRESENT MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE),
THE NEW PRESIDENT OF CULTURAL AND FOREIGN RELATIONS, ABDUL
QADER ASHNA, AND A SOLDIER REPLETE WITH AN AUTOMATIC RIFLE.

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3. THE MINISTER GREETED US WARMLY AND AS WE EXCHANGED
PLEASANTRIES, HE RECALLED FONDLY HIS EXPERIENCE WITH
AMERICANS, BOTH AS A STUDENT AT AUB AND LATER AT
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY TEACHERS COLLEGE, WHERE HE RECEIVED
HIS MASTERS DEGREE IN EDUCATION. THE MINISTER WENT ON
TO SAY HOW MUCH HE APPRECIATED PAST AMERICAN FOREIGN
ASSISTANCE, AND THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WELCOMED AID FROM

ALL FRIENDLY NATIONS, SO LONG AS IT WAS GIVEN WITHOUT CONDITIONS. I TOLD THE MINISTER THAT THE U.S. HAD NOT IN THE PAST, AND WOULD NOT IN THE FUTURE, PUT ANY POLITICAL CONDITIONS ON OUR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, BUT THAT WE DID IMPOSE TECHNICAL CONDITIONS BECAUSE WE WANTED TO BE CERTAIN THE ASSISTANCE WAS USED EFFECTIVELY. I NOTED THAT OUR EXPERIENCE WITH AID IN AFGHANISTAN WAS NOT ALWAYS POSITIVE; PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS HAD NOT ALWAYS USED OUR ASSISTANCE WELL.

4. I ASKED THE MINISTER WHAT HIS INITIAL IMPRESSIONS WERE OF THE PROBLEMS FACING HIM AND HIS MINISTRY. THE MINISTER SAID THAT THE UNIVERSITY OF KABUL WAS SIMPLY INADEQUATE FOR SERVING THE NEEDS OF A COUNTRY THE SIZE OF AFGHANISTAN. HE SAID HE PLANNED TO EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY HIGHER EDUCATION. THREE NEW FACULTIES WOULD BE ESTABLISHED IN JALALABAD -- ENGINEERING, AGRICULTURE, AND TEACHER TRAINING. THEY HAD PLANNED TO PLACE THE VETERINARY SCHOOL THERE ALSO, BUT FINALLY DECIDED ON KABUL INSTEAD. HE SAID THEY WOULD REQUIRE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE FOR CONSTRUCTING AND EQUIPPING THE SCHOOL BUILDINGS FOR THIS PLANNED EXPANSION.

5. AT THIS POINT, I BRIEFLY DESCRIBED THE CURRENT AID AND PEACE CORPS MANDATE THAT REQUIRED OUR ASSISTANCE TO BE DIRECTLY LINKED TO HELPING THE RURAL POOR MAJORITY.
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I SAID THAT THIS MADE ASSISTANCE TO HIGHER EDUCATION -- PARTICULARLY BUILDING CONSTRUCTION -- VERY DIFFICULT FOR AID; IFI'S, SUCH AS THE IBRD AND ADB, WERE BETTER SOURCES FOR FINANCING SUCH PROJECTS.

6. THE AID DIRECTOR OUTLINED THE STATUS OF AID ACTIVITIES WITH THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, INCLUDING OUTSTANDING PROJECT ISSUES. HE SPECIFICALLY ASKED WHETHER OR NOT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WISHED TO MOVE AHEAD WITH THE PREVIOUSLY PREPARED AID PROJECT TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO THE FACULTY OF ENGINEERING. DEPUTY MINISTER ZERAI REPLIED THAT THERE WERE SOME DIFFICULTIES AND THAT THEY WISHED TO STUDY THIS PROJECT FURTHER. WITH RESPECT TO THE RURAL WOMEN'S DORMITORY, THE DEPUTY MINISTER ASKED IF IT WOULD PRESENT ANY DIFFICULTIES TO AID TO CHANGE THE LOCATION OF THE BUILDING SITE. THE AID DIRECTOR EXPLAINED THAT ANY CHANGE IN THE LOCATION WOULD, INDEED, ENTAIL IMPORTANT DELAYS. HE NOTED THAT AN AFGHAN ENGINEERING FIRM WAS CURRENTLY STUDYING THE FEASIBILITY OF ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO PROVIDE BASIC HOUSING FACILITIES FOR RURAL WOMEN ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF KABUL, AS WELL AS DOING PRELIMINARY DESIGN WORK FOR

A DORMITORY ON THE PLANNED SITE. THE WORK IS EXPECTED
TO BE COMPLETED THIS MONTH.

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-31 ICA-11 PC-01 SS-15 SP-02
EB-08 L-03 ABF-01 TRSE-00 OES-07 CIAE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 /101 W

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R 080318Z JUN 78

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7. THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR EXPLAINED PAST AND PRDSENT INVOLVEMENT OF THE PEACE CORPS WITH THIS MINISTRY. HE NOTED THAT MOST OF THE PRESENT VOLUNTEERS WERE WORKING AT THE UNIVERSITY AS TEACHERS, BUT THAT HE WOULD PREFER TO HAVE COLUNTEERS INVOLVED MORE AS TRAINERS OF TEACHERS, SUCH AS AT THE TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTES. THE MINISTER SAID HE WAS AWARE OF AND APPRECIATED THE PEACE CORPS PROGRAM. HE ALSO SAID THAT HE HAD APPROVED THE FOUR VOLUNTEERS REQUESTED FOR THIS SUMMER. HOWEVER, WITH REGARD TO THE 25 VOLUNTEERS PREVIOUSLY REQUESTED FOR ARRIVAL NEXT WINTER, HE WANTED MORE TIME TO REVIEW THE REQUESTS. WHILE HE SAID THERE WOULD DEFINITELY BE CONTINUED NEED FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS, HE WISHED TO REVIEW VERY CAREFULLY THE REMAINING REQUESTS IN OTHER TECHNICAL AREAS. THIS WAS BECAUSE THERE WERE A LARGE NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED AND QUALIFIED AFGHANS, PARTICULARLY IN ENGINEERING, WHO HAD BEEN REFUSED JOBS BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME FOR PERSONAL AND POLITICAL REASONS. HE WANTED TO BE VERY CAREFUL THAT THE VOLUNTEERS DID NOT END UP DISPLACING QUALIFIED AFGHANS. HE ALSO INDICATED THAT THE USE OF VOLUNTEERS FOR TRAINING TEACHERS MIGHT HAVE SOME MERIT. I TOLD THE MINISTER THAT WE WERE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN INTEGRATING MORE EFFECTIVELY AID AND PEACE CORPS ACTIVITIES, AND THAT THIS MIGHT BE ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE IN THE AREA OF TEACHER TRAINING.

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8. THE PAO DESCRIBED BRIEFLY THE WORK OF AFAMEC AS THE MAIN AGENCY OF U.S.-AFGHAN ACADEMIC EXCHANGE, OBSERVED THAT ITS PROGRAMS WERE PROCEEDING IN GOOD ORDER -- THANKS IN LARGE PART TO THE EFFORTS OF THE NEW DEPUTY MINISTER, LONG A MEMBER OF THE AFAMEC BOARD, AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT EXCHANGES BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES WOULD CONTINUE TO FLOURISH AND BENEFIT BOTH COUNTRIES. THE CENTER FOR AFGHANISTAN STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA WAS CITED AS AN IMPORTANT FOCUS OF U.S. ACADEMIC INTEREST IN AFGHANISTAN. REFERENCE WAS MADE TO OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTACTS, SUCH AS MEETINGS OF KU FACULTY WITH VISITING ICS SPEAKERS, AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR KU STAFF AT THE AMERICAN CENTER. THE MINISTER DISPLAYED SOME KNOWLEDGE OF THE AFAMEC PROGRAM, MENTIONING THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COMING YEAR'S STUDENT PROGRAM. I NOTED TO THE MINISTER THAT, IN MY OWN EXPERIENCE, PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE U.S. WAS THE BEST WAY OUR COUNTRY COULD ASSIST A DEVELOPING COUNTRY LIKE AFGHANISTAN. THE MINISTER CONCURRED AND COMMENTED VERY FAVORABLY ON HIS OWN EXPERIENCE AT COLUMBIA.

9. NOTING THAT I HAD HEARD RUMORS OF A POSSIBLE COMBINING OF THE FACULTY OF ENGINEERING WITH POLY-TECHNIQUE, I ASKED THE MINISTER IF THERE WAS ANY BASIS FOR THIS. THE MINISTER SAID THAT THERE WAS CERTAINLY NO PLAN AT THE PRESENT TIME FOR COMBINING THESE INSTITUTIONS. HOWEVER, HE SAID THAT THEY WERE LOOKING AT THE ENTIRE UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION WITH A VIEW TO RATIONALIZING ITS STRUCTURE. HE SAID THAT SOME OF THE FACULTIES WERE CLEARLY MUCH TOO LARGE, AND THAT THEY WOULD PROBABLY BREAK THOSE INTO SMALLER FACULTIES. HE ALSO INDICATED THAT THEY WOULD PROBABLY CONSOLIDATE SOME OF THE EXISTING DEPARTMENTS FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY. HE SAID IT WAS POSSIBLE IN THIS CONTEXT FOR THE FACULTY OF ENGINEERING TO BE COMBINED WITH POLYTECHNIQUE, BUT IT WAS CERTAINLY NOT UNDER CONSIDERATION AT THIS TIME.

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10. AS WE PREPARED TO LEAVE, THE MINISTER SAID THAT HE OR HIS DEPUTY WOULD BE IN TOUCH SOON WITH AID AND PEACE FORPS ON THE PROJECT ISSUES RAISED DURING THE MEETING. HE RECALLED ONCE AGAIN HOW MUCH HE HAD APPRECIATED AND ENJOYED HIS EXPERIENCE WITH AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES AND THAT HE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH US IN THE FUTURE.

11. COMMENT: THE MINISTER WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO IMPRESS US WITH HIS FRIENDLINESS AND GOOD FEELINGS TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES. HE CAME ACROSS AS A SINCERE AND EARNEST PERSON WHO HAD DONE HIS HOMEWORK. WHILE HE OFTEN LET HIS DEPUTY ANSWER DETAILED QUESTIONS, HE APPEARED TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND COMPETENT IN HIS

NEW JOB. AT THE SAME TIME, IT WAS APPARENT BY THE END OF OUR
MEETING THAT HE HAD AVOIDED TAKING ANY POSITION REGARDING SPECIFIC
AID PROJECTS. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, EDUCATION, MINISTERIAL MEETINGS, VOLUNTARY AGENCIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 jun 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978KABUL04638
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: UPGRADED PER MEMO P830033-1070
Executive Order: OA 19830119 AINSWORTH, THOMAS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P830033-1071, D780239-0119
Format: TEL
From: KABUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780682/aaaacsou.tel
Line Count: 228
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: fd30408f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: LOU
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LOU
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2441385
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN: MEETING WITH MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION MAHMUD SUMA
TAGS: EAID, AF, US, PC, (SUMA, MAHMUD), (ELIOT, THEODORE E)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/fd30408f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014